

Understanding Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS)

The Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) is prepared by the manufacturer or importer of a chemical that describes the physical and chemical properties, physical and health hazards, routes of exposure, precautions for safe handling and use, emergency and first-aid procedures, and control measures. Information on an MSDS aids in the selection of safe products and helps prepare employers and employees to respond effectively to daily exposure situations as well as to emergency situations.

The MSDS's are a comprehensive source of information for all types of employers. Some information on the MSDS may not be useful to you. Concentrate on the information that is applicable to your situation. Focus on the hazard information and protective measures.

Employee Rights

- Your workplace is required to have MSDS's available for every hazardous chemical or substance you use or encounter as a part of your job.
- MSDS's must be readily available for your review at all times when you are at the work place. They cannot be locked in an office or filing cabinet to which you do not have access.
- You may request to examine a MSDS—your employer must accommodate you within 24 hours.
- You may request a copy of a MSDS—your employer must provide it within 15 working days.
- Find out from your employer where the pertinent MSDS's are located.

Employer Responsibilities

- Employers must ensure that up-to-date, complete, and accurate MSDS's are available to employees when they are in their work areas.
- Employers must ensure that information is provided for each hazardous chemical.

Information Provided on an MSDS

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) specifies the information to be included on an MSDS, but does not prescribe the precise format for an MSDS. A non-mandatory MSDS form that meets the Hazard Communication Standard requirements has been issued and can be used as is or expanded as needed. The MSDS must be in English and must include at least the following information:

- Chemical Identity
- Hazardous Ingredients
- Physical and Chemical Characteristics
- Fire and Explosion Hazard Data
- Reactivity (Instability) Data
- Health Hazards

- Primary Routes of Exposure
- OSHA Permissible Exposure Limits
- ACGIH Threshold Limit Values
- National Toxicology Program Annual report on Carcinogens or is a potential carcinogen in the International Agency for Research on Cancer
- Emergency and First Aid Procedures
- Date of Preparation and Last Update
- Name, Address, and Telephone Number of the Chemical Manufacturer, Importer, or Distributor
- Additional Information Appropriate to Emergency Procedures
- Precautions for Safe Handling and Use
- Control Measures

OSHA Requirements

While MSDS's are not required to be physically attached to a shipment, they must accompany or precede the shipment. When the manufacturer/supplier fails to send an MSDS with a shipment labeled as a hazardous chemical, the employer must obtain one from the chemical manufacturer, importer, or distributor as soon as possible. Similarly, if the MSDS is incomplete or unclear, the employer should contact the manufacturer or importer to get clarification or obtain missing information.

OSHA Complaint Process

When an employer is unable to obtain an MSDS from a supplier or manufacturer, he/she should submit a written complaint, with complete background information, to the nearest OSHA area office. OSHA will then call and send a certified letter to the supplier or manufacturer to obtain the needed information. If the supplier or manufacturer still fails to respond within a reasonable time, OSHA will inspect the supplier or manufacturer and take appropriate enforcement action.

APHIS's Hazardous Chemical Purchasing

When ordering hazardous chemicals, you must request and obtain new copies of the MSDS's from the vendor. You must ensure that the MSDS's are sent to the end-user. Make sure that this part of the transaction is agreed to before the order is placed. Although vendors are not required to provide MSDS's with every shipment (only the first shipment), most vendors will agree to provide MSDS's with each and every shipment. If not, inform them you may wish to seek out another vendor.